

USDOL/ETA Region 5

Roundtable: Creating A Credible Credentialing System

June 27-28, 2002

Minneapolis, MN

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USDOL/Region 5 Credential Roundtable

Day One: Thursday, June 27, 2002

The roundtable began at 1:00pm with **Mick Coleman, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Economic Security**, welcoming all attendees to the roundtable and to Minnesota. After highlighting nearby sites and activities, Mr. Coleman asked the audience about the *nature* of a credential. What is it? How can we establish meaningful benchmarks? How do we measure incremental success? How do we improve upon our practices? This roundtable is an opportunity to discuss these and other fundamental questions.

Byron Zuidema, Regional Administrator, DOL/ETA, Region 5, subsequently welcomed the attendees, (acknowledging that many participants were involved in a ‘performance rap session’ the day before with Maria Weidmark). Byron began by noting that this is the first focused attempt to look at credentialing. And, although many states started out with tough definitions, many have since learned they may need to loosen up those definitions given the comparative disadvantage in which they are subsequently placed relative to other states. This begs the question – what is it we *should* be doing? What levels *should* we shoot for? Byron further stated that his approach to performance negotiation is such that states shouldn’t be focusing on why they would want something like a 30% credential-related standard; rather, they should explain why 70% of the participants would *not* be expected to achieve a credential.

Further, although it may be tantalizing to entertain the notion of a more robust federal definition – given the current latitude – Byron cautioned attendees in this regard, stating that careful thought must be given to what states wish for. On the other hand, there is something to be said about continuity throughout the country. Clearly, therefore, we have this tension with which many states are understandably grappling.

Byron also challenged the audience by asking what they thought we owed to employers in terms of understanding the employer *requirements*, and how that matches with individual *acquirements*. We have to think about what we are going to do as a system where workers and employers know what they have in any ‘transaction’ because right now it’s all over the board. Yet, this is a key question because it really represents an important building block to what we can and will accomplish in this system. In addition, Byron also stated that there may be some who believe that credentials don’t matter and perhaps we should do away with the measures altogether. Although the initial reaction might be elation... *is that really appropriate?* He stated that credentials *should be* a ‘commodity of exchange’ in the workforce development system. Therefore, when we as a group look at performance in our states and how to improve performance in our states, we need to also think about what our workforce and workplaces deserve.

Byron then introduced the **Roundtable Facilitator, Maria R. Weidmark**, who began by reviewing the agenda, handouts, and explaining about the CDs on the resource table. (One CD contained most of the material contained in a binder also left on the resource table (slide shows, fact sheets, etc.); the binder was developed for training recently conducted in Hawaii. The second CD contained a 10-question ‘credential quiz’ in the format of an executable file.) There were enough copies of each so that each state, each represented region, and our subject matter expert could have a ‘set.’ It was also noted that there were no copyright restrictions; copies of each CD could be made. Maria also stated that the quiz and many like it will be placed on a website so that states and locals could use them as is, or tailor them to meet specific needs.

After attendee introductions, the facilitator started the discussion by using overheads demonstrating the national distribution of PY 2000 credential-related outcomes and how Region 5 states fared relative to these distributions (i.e., what outcome level was surpassed by 50% of states, 25% of states, and 10% of states). Several Region 5 states performed quite well given the figures contained in their Annual Reports, although it was recognized that ‘the numbers’ didn’t tell the complete story; for one thing, the context was missing (e.g., numerators/denominators). Nonetheless, these are the official numbers posted on the *usworkforce.org* website.

The facilitator focused the audience’s attention on a series of questions that were posted on two flipcharts. The questions were as follows:

- What has been the state’s response to federal requirements and guidelines?
- What policies/procedures/definitions have states and their local areas developed?
- What successes, if any, have states experienced?
- What are the primary questions and challenges faced by states?
- What issues/challenges would states like to focus on over the next two days?

Each state had approximately 6 minutes to come to the front of the room and respond to these questions, with the facilitator seeking clarification of specific items to ensure the correct capture of information. What follows is a summary of state responses. (Nebraska did not attend the roundtable.)

What has been the state’s response to federal requirements/guidelines? What policies, procedures, and/or definitions has the state (and locals) developed? (Note: Various state or other entity definitions and guidelines related to credentials are contained in Attachment A.)

Illinois

- First, it’s important to note that the negotiation process, for all good intentions, wasn’t an ideal scenario. The state embraced technical assistance and has encouraged local areas to further define the meaning of credential; therefore, a ‘home-grown/LWIB’ developed policy has been encouraged, but the state has not set specific policy in this regard.

Indiana

- The state has given local areas broad guidelines, although most of the guidelines have related to adult and dislocated worker programs. Part of the state ‘message’ has been that workforce development and economic development cannot be separated, and the state feels strongly in this regard. There’s also recognition of the need to develop credentials for hard-to-serve at-risk youth without compromising quality, although this has been a challenge.

Iowa

- They use the federal definition with no specific local guidelines delineated by the state; in fact, the state has discouraged local policies that go beyond the federal definition. The lack of guidance from the federal level has really been a catalyst for future problems and issues; there’s no way to compare states when there are different approaches and definitions.

Kansas

- They use the federal definition ‘as is’ although locals can add other elements and qualifications as believed appropriate. The question of state role vs. local role has been and remains a challenge.

Michigan

- They use the federal definition ‘as is’ but recognize that their 25 LWIAs possibly have 25 different policies because of the local flexibility encouraged by the state.

Minnesota

- At first, the state took a narrow/conservative approach; however, the liberal definitions of other states hurt the state from a comparative perspective. The quandary of different states with different baselines and a less than ideal negotiation process was also noted, as was the lack of federal guidelines. The state also chose to *not* go back to old JTPA case files to obtain info on credentials for the last 3 quarters of JTPA. This was also perceived as putting the state at a comparative disadvantage.

Missouri

- They began with the federal definition, but worked with their State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop current state policy. A state issuance outlined local parameters within which WIBs could set local policy.

Ohio

- Local policies and decisions further elaborating on the federal definition are encouraged.

Wisconsin

- They use the federal definition ‘as is’ and are presently engaging in a dialogue with Youth Councils to discuss what further steps the state can and should take. There’s also recognition that local areas need more direction, and the state would certainly like to provide it. The reality, however, is that there has not been any youth or adult WIA staff at the state level for six months. (The WI rep has been in the position for one month, having come from New Mexico.)

What are some of the state’s biggest successes? What about key questions/challenges?

Illinois

- Successes noted were the capacity of the state’s MIS system, which allows local areas to know where they stand via management and related reports, an open and broad state/local dialogue, and the recommendation that local areas go ‘back’ through JTPA case files for last 3 quarters so the state could report higher outcomes. The state also made inclusion on the ETPL a bit easier so there are more training options. One challenge cited is the recognition that training is a big part of the credential discussion; should membership on the ETPL be easier? What about these popular, shorter-term trainings offered by community colleges, for instance – how can and should credentials for these be established? Development of credentials related to OJT and customized training were also noted as challenges.

Indiana

- Successes include receipt of incentives for two consecutive years (Indiana is an early implementing state). One challenge cited involved questions over terminology; for instance, what do we mean specifically by ‘advanced training’ and ‘occupational skills’ to name just two. Yes, there’s a federal definition and some examples, but more is needed. Also noted was the challenge of aligning workforce development with economic development; they *should be* identical but aren’t.

Iowa

- A noted success is the revised process for selecting training participants; previously, adults and dislocated workers weren’t completing assigned training. However, more assessment and matching has been taking place. A noted challenge was the limitations of DOL guidance and the resultant issues that has generated. Keeping credential ‘integrity’ was also cited as a challenge (e.g., balancing the desire for quality with the desire and need for reported outcomes).

Kansas

- A key challenges noted was the need and desire to define a role for the state that makes sense.

Michigan

- A noted success was the state’s eligibility for incentive funds. One cited challenge was entering youth credentials (in particular) into the MIS system.

Minnesota

- A noted success was the state’s ‘redefining’ of its policy on credentials, which adds key qualifications and guidelines perceived as clear and appropriate. Challenges include the comparison across states, which led

the state to loosen its definition of appropriate credentials. The state felt ‘pushed’ to do so. Another cited challenge was the less than perfect negotiation process and the different approaches/baselines across states.

Missouri

- A noted success was the use of supplemental data, although the ‘employment side’ of the credential has been difficult. Specifically, verifying uncovered employment (in addition to credential attainment) has been a challenge. Regarding credentials specifically, there’s no database containing the information; it’s not like wage records kept at the state level. Further, education partners generally capture data annually, which is often too late. [Note: The state cited participation in WRIS as a desire but the cost was perceived as prohibitive; it was clarified by the facilitator and other federal staff that DOL/ETA has announced it will pay for WRIS at least through PY 2002.]

Ohio

- The state did poorly in PY 2000 and there is concern about less than stellar PY 2001 performance thus far. Part of the issue is the state’s MIS system, which can’t produce management reports (so locals know ‘where they are’) and the inability of local staff to produce meaningful management reports. Another noted challenge is the fact that 30 SDAs under JTPA are now 8 LWIAs under WIA; one of the eight areas has 64 delivery systems. Thus, there are organizational/structural challenges as well as programmatic.

Wisconsin

- The lack of staff at the state level has been a primary challenge; the WI representative was recently hired but there is much work to be done. Local areas need more direction but there have been limited or no staff to provide it.

Note: Based on the mention of “WorkKeys” by Illinois initially, and Wisconsin subsequently, there was a brief discussion of WorkKeys for the benefit of the roundtable attendees. (The WI rep came from NM, where WorkKeys was utilized successfully in ‘getting the right people in the right job’ and improving retention.) ***What is WorkKeys?*** WorkKeys is a job profiling and assessment system that reviews eight specific skill areas. In Illinois, every junior goes through the reading/math portion. Several community colleges also use it for job profiling, and some adult education providers use it for assessment. The system can be linked to the state’s job matching (Wagner-Peyser) system, whereby skills as evaluated by WorkKeys could be matched with specific jobs.

What issues/challenges would states like to discuss over the next 2 days? Where would you like to focus? What do you want to get out of this?

Illinois

- Viable possibilities for credentials that are based on shorter-term training; learning what others are doing.

Indiana

- Best practices; ideas for youth credentials; usage of terms including amount of leeway.

Iowa

- Possible criteria for sound local policies; learn how to keep credentials meaningful to employers.

Kansas

- Best practices; possible state policies; delineating state role; implementation strategies.

Michigan

- Learn what other states are doing; ideas for youth credentials; discuss MIS systems and how credentials are a part thereof.

Minnesota

- What’s a reasonable credential and let’s work from there; it would be a good idea to have a ‘buffet’ or menu of criteria, approaches, etc.

Missouri

- Learn what other states are doing; best practices.

Ohio

- Learn what other states are doing; making the ‘connection’ between credentials and the larger workforce system and relating that to local staff.

Wisconsin

- Learn from others; take back ideas/suggestions that can be disseminated.

There was a break subsequent to this facilitated dialogue, after which the facilitator did a short presentation on “Region 6 Issues/Experiences,” highlighting various definitions of *credential* used by some of the region’s eight states and noting the results/outcomes attained. (Note: Attachment A contains various definitions of *credential*.) Some of the specific issues identified by the facilitator included the following:

- Lack of understanding noted relating to federal policy on credentials; lack of understanding of state policy, particularly among providers (e.g., I didn’t know the state had a specific policy).
- Mixed messages cited, particularly by providers (high outcomes vs. credential ‘integrity’).
- WIBs want meaningful and portable credentials, but also want outcomes.
- Many reporting issues, including timeliness (education partners on annual reporting schedule poses difficulties) and statewide MIS issues, including inability of state systems to adequately capture all credential-related info (if someone gets credential at end of 3rd quarter post-exit, there must be capacity to report in the 4th quarter post-exit), as well as uncertainty among local staff and providers on how/where to report (which box? which form?)
- Despite GAO Report citing the lack of employer involvement, OJT/customized training generally not used as opportunity to work with employers.
- In general, the ‘least common denominator’ is often – is it meaningful to the individual (e.g., one ‘meaningful’ course successfully completed can result in a certificate or credential).

OBSERVATION: *Where is the education community?* Why is there an education representative from only *one* state at the roundtable? What does that mean and what message does it send? The two Illinois attendees noted the criticality of involving education at the very beginning and how that has made all the difference. The facilitator also pointed to decades of research on organizational dynamics and organizational change that can simply be stated as: participation leads to involvement, and involvement leads to *commitment*. If we want education (and other partners) to be committed to the process of establishing a credible credentialing system, they must be at the table from the beginning. (Although it was mentioned by some attendees that education partners often don’t *want* to be at the table when there aren’t additional resources in the offing, it was noted that the development of a ‘system’ was really in everyone’s best interest; looking solely at the funding aspect is somewhat myopic when you have the bigger picture in mind.)

Introduction of Rick Spill, subject matter expert, member of National Skill Standards Board (NSSB) and facilitator for many states seeking to embed skill standards and occupational certifications in workforce development programs and activities.

Rick is more than familiar with the workforce development system, having been involved in local, state, and federal programming efforts for more than 30 years. In addition to his general consulting activities, Rick works with the *National Skills Standards Board (NSSB)*, traveling about the country assisting states in their implementation efforts related to skill standards and certifications.

He began by stating that he wanted to zero in on two specific things he heard attendees mention throughout the day, particularly in the recent facilitated discussion: **QUALITY** and **IMPROVED TRAINING**. Simply put, Rick comes at both from the standpoint of *competencies*.

Employers want us to be responsive to them. The ‘revolving door’ that many employers are faced with today is simply not appropriate and it doesn’t have to be that way. Specifically, employees come and go and rarely have the same skill sets. When employers hire someone, they really don’t know what they’re getting, which is clearly problematic. He stated that even ‘3% repeat customers’ is too much for employers. Further, there isn’t enough money in the private sector to support all the desired training endeavors; therefore, the workforce development system has an *opportunity* to be responsive in this regard and not perpetuating the ‘strip mall training’ that is occurring in many places (e.g., Acme Typing School). *This is much broader than one area or even the One-Stop system.* Certainly, education and training, and competency-based education and training, are not specific to WIA/workforce development. ...And where do we start? WE START WITH NEEDS.

The inconsistency in employment/training activities and approaches really defies logic and is very frustrating for employers – the primary customer of the system. At a recent meeting with employers, Rick recalled one employer stating that he might hire six people trained as electronics technicians, but what he generally ends up with is six different kinds of employees because their learning objectives and assessments, and most everything else, has not been consistent. Rick informed the roundtable attendees that there are *more than 4,000* certifications that are industry-based, validated and recognized. They exist. So why don’t we use them????

Unfortunately, individuals can be trained using the ‘same’ curriculum and yet test very differently. Even community college programs focusing on the same subject matter and located *on the same campus* might be using different syllabi. Rick then referenced several states that are ‘doing what people want’ – AK, LA, NJ, SC, VA. He works closely with these states because they clearly want to make skill standards and certifications happen in their states. Based on his work, experience, and the research of the NSSB, it’s clear that **the drive toward standards and consistent competency-based objectives and approaches has taken off in every arena except WIA**. Why is that? In other words, *even the K-12 system has embraced skill standards*. They’re doing a much better job than WIA in many ways, but it doesn’t have to be that way.

Rick then offered TWELVE STEPS TO GET WIA ON TRACK WITH INDUSTRY-BASED AND VALIDATED SKILL STANDARDS:

1. All occupational training under WIA must be industry-based and validated and have consistent learning objectives, curriculum content, instructional content, and activities. Students should be taught in accordance with those standards and certifications.
2. All students should be given the opportunity to take appropriate certification exams. In AK, LA, and NJ, all students are required to do so.
3. Attainment of the WIA Credential Rates should be based on courses that are based on national standards where they exist. (In NJ, all occupational training in the K-12 system must follow this policy, and 70% of each graduating class must attain a level of proficiency or the training program will go on probation; if the program remains on probation for 3 years, they’re no longer utilized. It’s that simple.)

4. Information about standards and certifications should be ‘buried’ in all One-Stop Centers. It should be part of the air that’s breathed and not some analog.
5. Further, it’s not just trainees who should be certified, but *programs* must be certified as well. In NJ, for instance, no program can be part of the ETP List unless they teach to specific standards and certifications. (Comment that even the National Institute of Metalworkers has certified programs that could be used in WIA-funded programs.)
6. Instructors should be certified as well. (Trainees, Programs, Instructors – *all must be* certified).
7. Regarding quality control, there should be qualitative criteria set up so that each state could determine what’s appropriate in that state. For instance, in VA, they have qualitative criteria tied to all training programs that include the following: training leads to certification that is nationally recognized and industry-based; it’s competency-based; there’s 3rd party verification (i.e., teachers cannot assess their own students); certification leads directly to employment.
8. Curriculum alignment is critical. In other words, curricula should ‘teach to’ the standards and certifications. There should be the same teaching protocols and implementation strategies.
9. There should be a ‘report card’ for occupational certifications. How do individuals with those certifications fare in the labor market? How are the training programs performing relative to the recognized standards? Thus, getting data on occupational certification is important. For instance, in MD, all community colleges got together and developed a website for non-degree achievers so they could explore possibilities related to occupational certifications.
10. There must be a *unified approach*. All the stakeholders have to be at the table. NJ is an example of a unified approach to the use of standards and certifications. In LA, they have a state ‘industry-based certification council.’ Thus, there needs to be some sort of functional workgroup that involves higher education, economic development, correctional education, vocational rehabilitation, social services, and every other stakeholder.

(Note: Although “12 steps” were initially mentioned, only these 10 specific steps were captured by the facilitator.)

What do we mean specifically by SKILL STANDARDS? (from NSSB document)

Skill Standards are performance specifications that identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities an individual needs to succeed in the workplace. They should be competency-based, quantifiable, clearly stated and concise, and user-friendly. Furthermore, skill standards must be industry-driven, determined by methodologically appropriate, comprehensive, and rigorous empirical research/job analysis, and carefully validated by a statistically significant, broad-based, diverse, and geographically representative sampling of employers and workers across their area of application (e.g., industry sector). Their development and utilization should be legally defensible, current, accessible to and inclusive of relevant stakeholders, and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. (As stated in more detail later, according to the NSSB, the greatest return on investment from nationally-recognized, industry-based, and industry-validated skill standards and occupational certifications are certificate portability, skill transferability, worker mobility, education and training consistency, and the promotion of retention.)

Rick has often heard the comment or ‘complaint’ that the system *already* doesn’t have enough employment and training providers. If we require these providers to buy into skill standards and certifications, there will be even *fewer* training opportunities for WIA participants. Despite recognition of this dynamic, Rick’s response was ***who cares and so what???***...the bottom line is that if what we do has little meaning for employers and industry, *does it really matter how many providers we can point to on a list???* It was clear from the audience’s reaction that Rick’s passion was as compelling as his message. (Many attendees noted during the discussion, afterwards, and in the evaluations that Rick’s attendance at the roundtable was crucial; he was a wealth of critical information and had lots of experience to share.)

GETTING THERE – There are several different ways we can, as states, or as a system, get to where we want and need to be.

1. **Policies and Procedures** (could be a necessary driver; tell them what to do)
2. **Marketing** (*show* people how this makes perfect sense; educate them; provide information; market to providers and individuals)
3. **Research** (there are lots of occupations with existing licenses and certifications; part of what NSSB does is research certifications that meet specific state requirements, and there are many out there)
4. **Implementation Strategies** (the strategy needs to fit the operational framework in the state; one strategy might be, for instance, to develop 5 certifications in year one and 10 in year two; another strategy might be that providers/programs aren’t allowed on the ETP List unless their training is based on state licensing requirements; in terms of the specifics, Rick uses a 22-step approach, which is delineated in the publication that is part of the participant folders – i.e., *NSSB-An Introduction to the Use of Skill Standards and Certifications in WIA Programs-2002*)

The facilitator then asked Rick how a state might ‘begin’ the necessary process...

It could actually be very simple, according to Rick. For instance, a state could literally pick some occupations, research them, and if they make sense to a state entity, implement them. Sometimes states do ‘pieces’ of the process step by step, or they take on the whole shebang. According to Rick, this can be done in fairly short order and *sooner than one year*. States simply have to decide it’s what they want to do and then just do it. (Rick cited Job Corps as an example of a program that’s made a lot of improvement in making certifications part of their courses. And, in NJ, for instance, you cannot become a state-licensed proprietary school unless you use certifications and standards. In VA, they cross-walk all skill standards with certification requirements; their diploma is a ‘true’ liberal arts diploma in his opinion.)

Another point Rick made was that every state is different, so implementation will naturally be different. ***You start by getting together the stakeholders and work through the process for as long as it takes*** (e.g., using the 22-step process delineated in the aforementioned document). Simply put, and as stated previously, we start with needs. Find out what employers want to do and develop a plan to do it. The key is listening to needs and wants. Rick generally acts as a facilitator throughout the process. (Rick is presently acting as a facilitator for a 21-state workgroup that is working on the establishment of credentialing systems.)

Interestingly, Rick noted that there was actually a session like this one in this region about 1.5 years ago, “but there were no takers.” Similarly, he’s gone to many other states and regions, but with the same disappointing result. (Note: The facilitator and other DOL/ETA staff present openly wondered why they

didn't know anything about this and why it appeared as though this critical topic area was somehow 'divorced' from ETA.)

Based on questions, feedback, comments, Rick began a dialogue about occupational certifications in particular. As per the referenced NSSB document, ***occupational certifications*** are self-contained, end-result processes by which the mastery of predetermined knowledge and skills is demonstrated through appropriate assessment protocols, and affirmed through the award of related credentials. The certifications attest to and publicly recognize an individual's attainment of the knowledge and skill qualifications required to work at a specific job. (Note: Attachment B contains key definitions and other useful 'nuggets' of information for easy reference.)

FIVE BENEFITS OF SKILL STANDARDS AND OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATIONS:

1. ***Portability across the country and even internationally***
2. ***Skill transferability***
3. ***Worker mobility, so that individuals could work for more than one company***
4. ***Employment and training consistency so that what's learned in one institution is the same as what's learned in another***
5. ***Promotes retention***

And what's the big picture?? – There are no more individual areas and providers doing their own thing with different results. Training for one employer won't cut it anymore.

What do we mean by third-party verification? Rick responded to this inquiry by stating that it's easier to talk about what third-party verification *isn't*. In other words, teachers can't evaluate their own students; if someone is being evaluated on performance such as in the area of customer service, an expert might be brought in to do the observation/evaluation.

TO REALLY INSTITUTIONALIZE THIS 'THOUGHT PROCESS' AND MOVE TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION, YOU HAVE TO HAVE A HIGH-LEVEL STATE "CHAMPION."

Furthermore, to be completely responsive to business/industry, we don't just need nationally-recognized occupational certifications, but ***Work Readiness Certifications*** that serve to verify work readiness knowledge and skills (e.g., particularly for youth). The Work Readiness Certification is intended to be a locally-determined, cross business/industry, generic, composite profile of the ideal entry-level employee in a particular jurisdiction or labor market. It will signify achievement of a single, customized set of foundation work readiness knowledge and skills by WIA program participants. These knowledge/skill categories are, in fact, similar to those under JTPA: pre-employment, work maturity, employability, academic, and occupational/technical.

In Rick's opinion and based on his consulting experience, he sees a *minimum* of 200-400 hours of work readiness instruction. (He noted, for instance, that youth need to learn about problem-solving before we test them on solving problems; they have to learn about teamwork before being assessed as a certain kind of team member.)

Heads Up: *May 6-May 8, 2003 will be the first conference on the use of skill standards.* Hopefully, this will be the first *annual* conference. It's going to be held in Madison, Wisconsin in association with the NSSB, NAWB, and other stakeholders. There will be a variety of 'tracks,' such as those related to K-12 and even WIA. Mark your calendars!

Rick also referenced another document in the participant folders, stating that its importance is reflected by its authors – NAWB chairs. If the National Association of Workforce Boards is making ‘recommendations for action,’ it’s something we should all be paying attention to. Here is a summary of the action steps recommended:

Recommendations for Action: *Source, Building a World-Class Workforce, 2002. Note: For more information on the individual steps subsumed within each action item, see the complete document.*

1. Design a workforce investment system that is demand-driven (referenced in this specific recommendation is supporting state implementation and dissemination of a voluntary, industry-validated, nationally recognized system of occupational certifications and skill standards).
2. Actively promote life-long learning, re-skilling, and upgrading of the workforce (referenced in this recommendation is promoting the development and use of portable credentials).
3. Transform the system’s alignment – accountability systems, funding mechanisms, and management.
4. Transform the workforce system’s image, culture, and philosophy.
5. Engage state and local education agencies/entities and economic development departments as full partners with state and local workforce investment boards.
6. Overhaul LMI systems at the federal and state levels to be more current, effective, and user-friendly in providing quality data and analysis to make good business and career decisions.

Although attendees commented on the feeling of ‘overwhelmed’ – both by the information and the seeming task ahead – there was a tremendous amount of positive energy, which carried over into Day Two.

USDOL/Region 5 Credential Roundtable

Day Two: Friday, June 28, 2002

The day began with a 10-question ‘credential quiz’ for those roundtable participants interested in participating. The facilitator described the complete version of the technical assistance tool and the region’s plans for posting this and related quizzes on its website. (Each state received a CD containing the quiz.) Subsequently, acknowledging that the previous day was full of information and eye-opening in many respects, the facilitator asked the attendees what they would like to focus on for the remainder of the roundtable. Suggestions were: Discuss viable work readiness certification; Discuss a menu or ‘buffet’ of criteria for credentials; Discuss how to maintain local flexibility (i.e., balanced approach to credential requirements); Discuss what is and isn’t a credible credential.

Attendees made the decision to focus on what should and what shouldn’t be a credible credential, noting specific criteria. Flipcharts with ‘yes’ and ‘no’ emerged, listing sets of attributes or criteria as follows:

“YES” – qualities and attributes	“NO” – qualities and attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allow for upward mobility not previously possible ○ Assist in obtaining unsubsidized employment ○ Skill/Competency-based ○ Recognized by employer community, industry ○ Marketable (employers will hire based on credential) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Doesn’t only focus on WIA ○ Not just ‘certificate of attendance’ (i.e., seat time) ○ Time/length of training shouldn’t be determining factor as long as it’s quality (and meets specific criteria)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It could be based on short-term (but quality) training (e.g., Community College Board in IL approved a process for short-term training activities – like ‘building blocks’ – that could be certifiable) ○ Has value in the field; Practical and useable ○ Sound methodology to validate skills attained ○ Transferability across industry sectors/employers, across state lines and even internationally ○ Includes specific educational (skill) attainment ○ Maintain local flexibility (e.g., employer-specific ok) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ‘Repeating’ classes/courses isn’t necessary for the individual
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It was noted by the facilitator and others that the criteria/attributes listed were really either the same as, or extensions of, the criteria for ‘skill standards’ and ‘occupational certifications’ that were posted all over the room and contained in many of the documents contained in participant folders (e.g., *An Introduction to the Use of Skill Standards and Certifications in WIA Programs*). So where do we go from here?

Our subject matter expert, Rick Spill, noted that part of the difficulty we were having was that we were working on several different levels or tiers at the same time. For instance, some comments and concerns related to ‘credential survival’ (e.g., I have WIA standards to meet), while others related to creating a *system*. There was a ‘just-do-it’ feeling amidst ‘let’s not forget local flexibility,’ along with ‘we’re not sure where to begin.’ Rick challenged the audience by asking them – why is the system the same as it was 12 years ago? ...he proffered that the reason was the kind of feedback and ‘issues’ raised by many over the past several minutes. Similar to his experience one-and-a-half years ago, when Rick came to the region to discuss pretty much the same topic – inevitably – individuals just ‘dug in’ and refused to move. It wasn’t intended as a chastising remark, but merely a perfectly candid and honest observation, which was likewise shared/echoed by the facilitator.

We either move forward or we don’t. We either decide that we’re going to move forward or we don’t. The whole issue of ‘one person making a difference’ was referenced – not as a trite proclamation – but rather as a truism based on both history, as well as the personal experience of many of the audience members. (One roundtable attendee shared that she had been homeless at one point and yet ended up going to an Ivy League university; had she listened to all the individuals in her life who said *you can’t*, she’d be dead right now – period.) *If you can see the invisible, you can achieve the impossible.*

With that and other remarks, the facilitator stated that we’d come too far to just simply give up and maintain the bureaucratic inertia. We would not leave without having a viable action plan and some ‘real’ recommendations (otherwise this was an unappreciated waste of everyone’s time).

Rick offered additional information on ‘systems’ that were already operating, such as that in Alaska. He shared that post-secondary institutions in AK got together and came up with a proposed set of vocational education program standards. They imposed these operating guidelines *on themselves* and all programs must satisfy specific criteria as follows:

1. All faculty must satisfy requirements of an instructor certification process, where one exists;
2. All programs must use standards from accredited agencies, nationally-recognized universities, or industry-recognized. They tie together the degree and recognition of occupationally based certifications.
3. All programs must prepare students to satisfy employer-related knowledge, skills, abilities – as assessed by related examinations. (It’s aligned with what employers want.)

4. Students have the opportunity to take certification exams *and* receive degrees.
5. Programs must satisfy requirements of nationally recognized, industry-based certification processes where such criteria exist and are relevant.

Another example offered was the approach and processes used by the American Association of Community Colleges. They've established specific criteria for customized training programs, degree programs, and non-degree programs such that all certification processes must possess the following characteristics:

- Portability
- The system must be modular
- Based on competencies and outcomes and not just seat time
- Recognized by professional industry and trade associations (demonstrating relevance)
- Must convey mechanism for 'upgrades'
- Contain mechanisms to accommodate prior learning
- Recognition of support functions related to assessment such as third party verification

Maybe it was the cookies, maybe it was the brownies, maybe it was the 'push' from the facilitator, maybe it was the strength of the underlying message, but the energy that was present in the room became positively focused, and one idea/recommendation led to the next.

A comment made by an attendee from KS was explored and ended up as a recommendation for a *Task Force on Credentials in WIA programs/activities*. Lots of ideas for 'products and people' were generated and captured on flipcharts (e.g., involvement of NAWB). Further, ETA performance specialists from Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, openly agreed that Chris Kulick – the National Office Performance Team Leader – would be the right person to lead this effort and make it happen. **(See Attachment C for Action Items.)** ETA staff would do their best to act as catalysts for this effort.

Further, it was agreed that we needed some specific 'goal' for the Task Force – something to achieve at an absolute minimum. The facilitator talked about the kind of guidance transmitted by ETA's youth office, which is outstanding and which presents lots of ideas, options, additional measures, strategies, resources, etc. *without being a 'hammer.'* At a minimum, the Task Force could write a Training & Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) containing information on the Task Force, recommendations from NAWB, experiences/strategies of other states who are 'making it happen,' and possible criteria for credentials/certifications that could be adopted by states/locals. (Facilitator to take the lead on communicating this to ETA/National Office staff.)

Thereafter, each time one suggestion/recommendation was offered, the facilitator asked for individuals who would take responsibility and also identify specific time frames. The last couple of hours or so generated lots of energy and ideas and the roundtable concluded on a high positive note.

Attachment C contains all action items, parties responsible, and timelines.

[Rick Spill mentioned an upcoming publication written by Anthony Carnavale entitled *Help Wanted – Credentials Required.*]

Attachment A

[Various Definitions of Credentials used to inform discussion]

Federal Definition of Credential (TEGL 7-99) – A nationally-recognized degree or certificate or State/locally recognized credential. Credentials include, but are not limited to, a HS Diploma, GED or other recognized equivalents, post-secondary degrees/certificates, recognized skill standards, and licensure or industry-recognized certificates. States should include all State Education Agency recognized credentials. In addition, States should work with local WIBs to encourage certificates to recognize successful completion of the training services listed above that are designed to enter or re-enter employment, retain employment, or advance into better employment.

Nevada – Use federal definition with the important qualification that all training must be conducted by State-accredited institutions.

Hawaii – A credential is a certificate, HS Diploma, Associate degree, Baccalaureate degree, or graduate degree. A certificate means the individual has demonstrated through an evaluation and assessment process that the majority of the program's documented learning definitions have been achieved at a level of competency set by the provider.

Oregon/Washington – Use 'employment as credential,' meaning that if a participant completed training and then found a job, the employment is, in effect, a credentialing or certification that the training met the needs of the employer. (Note: Although neither state considers this a quality measure, DOL policies 'required' them to go this route.)

Center for Workforce Learning – A credential is evidence that someone has acquired certain knowledge and/or mastered certain skills. It is often viewed as proof of an individual's competency to perform certain tasks or a job (Source: Illinois Credentialing TAG, contained in participant folders).

Missouri's Performance Handbook – "...the value of a credential for WIA clients is that it provides verification of mastery of a subject that is both meaningful to employers and portable.... It has credibility with the employer community and is valued across state lines..." (page 3)

Minnesota – The following represent acceptable credentials:

- HS Diploma/GED
- AA, AS, BA, BS
- Occupational Skills License recognized by a government body, union, or appropriate industry
- Occupational Skills Certificate or Credential recognized by a government body, union, or appropriate industry
- Proof that the individual has completed at least 50% of a required curriculum, with a GPA of at least a "C" and obtained unsubsidized employment – proof of GPA/course completion includes a transcript, and proof of employment includes pay stubs
- Successful completion of an OJT contract evidenced by employer certification (must contain employer signature although the employer certification itself is left up to local boards)
- Successful completion of a customized training program as evidenced by employer certification (must contain employer signature although the employer certification itself is left up to local boards)

Note: This represents MN's *draft* policy, which they are hoping to finalize quickly. The definition/policy has been broadened from that used in PY 2000 to minimize the comparative disadvantage the more stringent definition had on the state. The draft policy also includes specific documentation requirements.

Attachment B

[Nice Nuggets and Info from documents used/distributed at Roundtable]

Skill Standards are performance specifications that identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities an individual needs to succeed in the workplace. They should be competency-based, quantifiable, clearly stated and concise, and user-friendly. Furthermore, skill standards must be industry-driven, determined by methodologically appropriate, comprehensive, and rigorous empirical research/job analysis, and carefully validated by a statistically significant, broad-based, diverse, and geographically representative sampling of employers and workers across their area of application (e.g., industry sector). Their development and utilization should be legally defensible, current, accessible to and inclusive of relevant stakeholders, and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

Occupational Certifications are self-contained, end-result processes by which the mastery of predetermined knowledge and skills is demonstrated through appropriate assessment protocols, and affirmed through the award of related credentials. The certifications attest to and publicly recognize an individual's attainment of the knowledge and skill qualifications required to work at a specific job.

Why skill standards and occupational certifications? They promote:

- certificate portability
- skill transferability
- worker mobility
- education and training consistency
- retention

Work Readiness Certifications attest to work readiness knowledge and skills. It is intended to be a locally-determined, cross business/industry, generic, composite profile of the ideal entry-level employee in a particular jurisdiction or labor market. (These knowledge/skill categories are similar to those under JTPA: pre-employment, work maturity, employability, academic, and occupational/technical.)

Recommendations for Action from Building a World-Class Workforce, written by NAWB Chairs:

1. Design a workforce investment system that is demand-driven (referenced in this specific recommendation is supporting state implementation and dissemination of a voluntary, industry-validated, nationally recognized system of occupational certifications and skill standards).
2. Actively promote life-long learning, re-skilling, and upgrading of the workforce (referenced in this recommendation is promoting the development and use of portable credentials).
3. Transform the system's alignment – accountability systems, funding mechanisms, and management.
4. Transform the workforce system's image, culture, and philosophy.
5. Engage state and local education agencies/entities and economic development departments as full partners with state and local workforce investment boards.
6. Overhaul LMI systems at the federal and state levels to be more current, effective, and user-friendly in providing quality data and analysis to make good business and career decisions.

GETTING THERE:

1. **Policies and Procedures**
2. **Marketing**
3. **Research**
4. **Implementation Strategies**

Attachment C

Action Items/Who's Responsible/Time Frame

Description: A primary result/follow-up of the Roundtable should be a *Credential Task Force*, with membership including Rick Spill (as SME), education, employers, members of the National Office Performance Team including Chris Kulick, select Regional Office staff, Evan Rosenberg (Office of Youth Services, National Office), Region 5 state staff (who can commit resources, or who can, at a minimum, 'speak' for their state), and other stakeholders. *And what would this task force 'do?' What 'product' would result from the work of the Task Force?* — At a minimum, the group would work on a possible 'menu' of criteria for credentials and certifications, in addition to suggestions for implementation strategies. For instance, the Youth Office published two outstanding documents: TEGL 18-00 (4/23/01) and TEGL 28-01 (5/20/02), both related to *Program Guidance for Implementation of Comprehensive Youth Services Under WIA*. These documents present *guidelines and suggestions*, appropriately referencing the required youth measures as well as possible additional measures. The Task Force could come up with something similar related to credentials.

WHO: Maria R. Weidmark, USDOL/ETA, Region 6 (San Francisco) – mrweidmark@doleta.gov

WHAT:

#1 – Maria to e-mail Chris Kulick, Jim Aaron, Evan Rosenberg giving a brief overview of what transpired during the two-day meeting (stating that minutes will be forthcoming pending attendee review of same), and seeking support for a task force or similar body.

WHEN: Immediate (no later than the Monday following the roundtable)

#2 – Maria to communicate general framework/timeline and other desires of the roundtable members to the National Office Performance Team, including Evan Rosenberg (e.g., we want to put this on a fast track to extent possible, perhaps have nominations for Task Force by 7/30 and first meeting late August/September, 2002).

WHEN: Either Immediate (within previously referenced e-mail) or week of July 8th (when Maria returns from vacation)

#3 – Maria will contact Bob Knight (NAWB) and Bill Tracy (Heldrich Center) to seek support for idea and ask if they would consider being part of the effort.

WHEN: Week of July 8th

Description: States in Region 5 don't want to lose the momentum and want to keep the dialogue going. It was suggested that it would be useful for all ten states to learn where their colleagues in other states are in relation to a series of specific questions, including: 1) Where is the education community in the state's workforce system? 2) What is the state's honest/candid assessment of where they are in terms of credential policies/guidance including various definitions? 3) What are other states' incentive policies and to what extent do they/could they promote credible credentialing systems? 4) What is the relationship between the state and its local areas in terms of credentials?

WHO: Marium Baker, USDOL/ETA, Region 5 (Chicago) – mbaker@doleta.gov

WHAT: Obtain feedback from ten Region 5 states regarding key credential-related questions.

WHEN: By no later than July 15, 2002, Marium will e-mail all Region 5 states with specific questions, including a timeline for state response.

Description: Many attendees wanted to take the approach of ‘policy’ as a driving force behind the creation of a statewide credible credentialing system and believed that writing up what took place at the roundtable and presenting it as a ‘vision’ to a state board and moving forward from there would be a good idea. In particular, the Ohio representative wanted to move forward in this direction quickly, without losing the momentum and energy that came from the roundtable.

WHO: Steve Clayborn, Ohio Department of Job & Family Services – claybors@odjfs.state.oh.us

WHAT: Development of a ‘state vision’ of a credible credentialing system, whether in the form of draft state policy or guidance to local areas with parameters specified

WHEN: By August 1, 2002 – Steve to send final ‘document’ to group (or info on why the effort didn’t have any forward movement). (Facilitator will send appropriate reminder and how-are-you-doing messages prior to deadline.)

Description: One local board is already looking at skill standards in certain occupations and attempting to tie those to training capacity. In other words, does the local system have the capacity to train in those industries and occupations and how are they validating outcomes. Instead of reinventing the wheel, the board’s ‘process’ could inform other state/local efforts, e.g., what challenges are you dealing with and how have they been addressed, what steps have there been toward implementation as envisioned, what recommendations or suggestions would you have for the rest of us?

WHO: Kathy Zavala, Director, Stearns-Benton Employment/Training Council – kzavala@sbetc.des.state.mn.us

WHAT: Progress report on local implementation efforts.

WHEN: Fall, 2002 (Facilitator will e-mail Kathy to get specific time frame)

Description: Let’s not lose the momentum. We need to be able to communicate as a group, to keep each other posted on how we’re progressing with our own ‘efforts’ and, in general, to keep one another informed of activities. It would be ideal if a group e-mail or *listserv* could be set up, consisting of all attendees (e-mail addresses contained in attendee list).

WHO: Maria R. Weidmark

WHAT: Look into feasibility of DOL (regional or national) setting up a listserv so that any and all roundtable attendees could send an e-mail to the entire group by typing, for instance, *credential group*.

WHEN: Begin looking into who/what/where no later than week of July 8th.

Description: One idea generated from the lively discussion near the conclusion of the roundtable was the viability and efficacy of a ‘newsletter’ that would serve as another way of keeping communication lines open and sharing information. The work involved, however, is somewhat prohibitive considering other staff roles and responsibilities. DOL/ETA staff from Philadelphia mentioned their “Fast Facts” publication, which isn’t as intensive as a newsletter, but it does keep R2 states posted on important ‘facts.’

WHO: Chantal Watler, USDOL/ETA, Region 2 (Philadelphia) – cwatler@doleta.gov

WHAT: Send Marium Baker (R5) one or more samples of the “Fast Facts” that Philadelphia uses.

WHEN: Immediate (week of July 1, 2002)

Description: Indiana has already begun work on a viable “Work Readiness Certification.” Jennifer Biddle will take back information from the roundtable to inform those discussions (e.g., work readiness certification requirements delineated in a separate document on the resource table, brought by Rick Spill, and created by Nancy Humphrey). Having such a certification, particularly for youth, resonated with many attendees and progress reports keeping the rest of the group informed would be beneficial (e.g., what is working, what isn’t, how can we help, etc.).

WHO: Jennifer Biddle, Indiana Dept. of Workforce Development – jbiddle@dwd.state.in.us

WHAT: Keep roundtable members informed of local progress on development of work readiness certification system (e.g., e-mail).

WHEN: First progress report due no later than September 30, 2002 (Facilitator will send intermittent how-are-you-doing e-mails)

Description: One of the points made by Rick Spill in terms of really seeing this through was the necessity of having a “state champion.” In terms of an *overall* regional (and perhaps national) strategy or guidelines, we’ll need a champion with even greater appeal. Byron Zuidema, Regional Administrator of Region 5, would be the ideal candidate – particularly given his Day One remarks.

WHO: Paul Fredericks, USDOL/ETA, Region 5 (Chicago) – pfredericks@doleta.gov

WHAT: Share feedback on the roundtable with Byron and seek his support as our ‘credential champion’ (e.g., supporting the Task Force), garnering National Office support if necessary.

WHEN: Immediate (week of July 1, 2002)

Description: All Region 5 states present recommended a *regional issuance* that summarized the roundtable (what happened, where we want to go, etc.), ideas for what is and is not a viable credential, and possible next steps. This R5 issuance would also be shared with other regional offices (at a minimum, Regions 2 and 6).

WHO: Paul Fredericks

WHAT: Secure Regional Administrator support for regional issuance and draft issuance.

WHEN: Secure support week of July 1, 2002 and begin drafting issuance